

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

“The Church’s social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society.”

United States Council of Catholic Bishops

1. Sanctity of Life and Dignity of the Human Person

This principle is the foundation of all Catholic Social Teachings. It highlights the Catholic belief that ALL human life is sacred regardless of age, ability, or state in life and that *people* are more important than *things*. This principle underscores the Church’s teachings against abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research, cloning, the death penalty, and unjust war.

Some examples of service experiences that promote the life and dignity of the human person:

- Volunteering at a pro-life center
- Visiting the elderly at a nursing or retirement home
- Writing and sending letters to legislators addressing topics of life and dignity (please only do so with your parents’ permission)

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The Church teaches that not only is the human person sacred but also social. The first “society” that we experience is the family. The Church strives to nurture and protect the family above all, but also recognizes the importance of other communities: parishes, schools, teams, towns, etc. It is our responsibility to promote the common good of these communities and serve the needs of their members.

Some examples of service experiences that nurtures community:

- Helping with a parish or school event
- Being a Vacation Bible School leader
- Assisting at a sports camp

3. Rights and Responsibilities

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity is only upheld when basic human rights are upheld. Every person has a right to life as well as the things necessary to a good life: food/water, employment, health care, and education.

Some examples of service experiences that safeguard basic human rights:

- Packaging food for Feed My Starving Children
- Collecting food or personal hygiene items and donating them
- Serving food with Sharing and Caring Hands, Meals on Wheels, etc.

4. Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“You can judge a society by how it treats its most weakest members” is the often heard quote associated with this social teaching. Christ calls us to take care of our brothers and sisters, especially those forgotten in our country: the unborn, poor, handicapped, elderly, terminally ill, etc. When voting and forging new policies we are called to remember that “We who have a voice must speak for the voiceless”.

Some examples of service experiences that serve the poor and vulnerable:

- Volunteering at a soup kitchen
- Helping with Special Olympics
- Visiting the sick

5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work should not just be about making money, but participating in God's work. Workers have basic rights that should always be respected: the right to fair wages, the ability to join and organize unions, safe working conditions, etc.

Some examples of service experiences that protect the dignity of workers:

- Volunteering at the Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul
- Write to legislatures about raising minimum wages or creating jobs for the unemployed (please only do so with your parents' permission)

6. Solidarity

We are one human family regardless of race, religion, language, or even location in the world. There is a temptation to care only about our own needs, but the Church reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters and that "loving thy neighbor" goes beyond our own family, school, or city.

Some examples of service experiences that create solidarity:

- Going on a mission trip (locally or long-distance)
- Sponsor a child through the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (www.cfausa.org).
- Participate in a Catholic Relief Services "Food Fast" (see www.Foodfast.org)

7. Care for God's Creation

If you read the first chapter of Genesis, you will see that the 2nd commandment God gave man and woman was to take care of the world He had just made. That responsibility has not changed. Though it is right to use the earth's resources, it is not right to abuse them whether by wasting water, electricity, filling the air with pollution, etc. By respecting creation, we respect our Creator.

Some examples of service experiences that care for God's creation:

- Volunteering at the Humane Society
- Participating in litter removal
- Volunteer to help out at a state or city park